

Hans Küng's Crusade: Framing a Global Ethic

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For the last decade Hans Küng has devoted much of his formidable intellectual and political energy to promoting "a global ethic" as a key to peace and a sense of a shared human community in an increasingly globalized world. The campaign has been successful, if measured in such conventional ways as contributing centrally to influential formulations on global policy by world religious and political leaders, engaging even the energies of the InterAction Council, a respected NGO composed of former heads of state.

The project of a global ethic also directly and explicitly challenges Samuel P. Huntington's widely debated contention that world civilizations are on an unavoidable collision course. Küng, as might be expected from such a renowned theologian, also links the prospect of a global ethic to his conviction that a religious grounding for ethical claims encompassing the human species is at once indispensable and possible. Despite this, as would also be expected from Küng on the basis of his earlier work, he supports the adoption of a global ethic only if formulated in a manner that invites participation by nonbelievers and secular humanist perspectives, as well as by fellow-adherents to one of the world religions. Küng stands for maximal inclusiveness in relation to the form and content of a proposed global ethic.

It is difficult to situate historically a project to establish the authority of a global ethic, given an intellectual terrain in which the mainstream political imagination seems currently preoccupied by the dialectical tension between globalization and fragmentation.¹ Against such a background, it is necessary to raise the awkward question as to whether Küng's call for a global ethic as articulated most fully in his *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Global Economics* is at all politically relevant within such an unfolding global setting.² I will set forth Küng's argument, as presented in *A Global Ethic*, situating it in contemporary world order thinking, and then evaluate its contribution to the ongoing debate about whether the sovereign state is being superseded, and if so, in what respects. In essence, the idea

behind “a global ethic” is to launch a political project for human betterment that engages religious and political leaders throughout the world and, subsequently, establishes a climate that fosters improved inter-civilizational communication and understanding.³

Such an assessment of this latest effort by Hans Küng should be read against a background of admiration for the integrity, courage, and wisdom that has characterized his long life as an engaged Christian theologian who has weathered the turbulent storms of twentieth-century Germany.⁴

While considering Küng’s campaign for a global ethic, seemingly directed mainly at leadership circles within government, religious arenas, and in civil society, we need to keep in focus the complex question of whether ethical argument can ever provide sufficient *agency* for adaptive global change. Or alternatively, whether such agency has become superfluous because integrative trends, often identified with “globalization,” are by themselves pushing toward a unified world community for which a global ethic could emerge as a *consequence*. It may be helpful to analogize the evolution of “a global ethic” with that of “a national ethic” associated with the democratization of the modern sovereign state over a period of centuries, including the commitment to uphold the “rights” of citizens.⁵

HANS KÜNG’S ARGUMENT FOR A GLOBAL ETHIC

Starting Points. Küng starts from a concern that there is missing from influential political thought and from cultural space what he calls “**a realistic vision of the future**” (bold in original; p. xiii). For Küng this is a serious, perhaps fatal, deficiency as “problems continue to press in and the pressure is becoming greater, since today not only questions of national destiny but global questions, even that of the very survival of humankind, are on the political agenda, especially for Europeans and Americans” (pp. xiii-xiv). There is an urgency about Küng’s tone, clearly intensified by his sense of the millennial threshold. At the same time, Küng wants to avoid a series of traps that he views as particularly tempting for someone of religious persuasion. More specifically, it is important for Küng to avoid the negative connotations of mere moralizing about a better future and of projecting utopias that have no chance of being realized. The promotion of a global ethic, in contrast, seeks to engage with power and the powerful, and link their sense of national interest to the relevance of “the spiritual and cultural foundations of humankind” (p. xiv). In this respect, Küng seeks to avoid falling into either the trap of “political naiveté” lecturing to those holding positions of political influence without an appreciation of the role of power in confronting evil challenges that arise in the world or that of “moral

arrogance" associated with a sense of unconditional self-righteousness. Küng respects those with responsibilities in the domain of power and seems genuinely aware of the fallibility of his own ethical intuitions, thereby insisting on subjecting his own ideas to continuous reflection and self-criticism.

Despite this nondogmatic posture, Küng's analysis is not at all tentative. He describes himself as a "passionate advocate of reason and undeterred visionary," in the tradition of Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace*. This strikes me as an accurate assessment, although it needs to be contextualized in the setting of the late twentieth century, which emphasizes the many facets of globalization, as well as the post-Cold War climate of secular nihilism and religious extremism. For Küng the central challenge is to mobilize the positive potentialities of religion, politics, and economics as a normative counterweight to the destructive tendencies that are otherwise likely to engender a bloody era of "culture wars" and "religious wars."⁶

Giving the devil his due, and more. One of the most distinctive features of Küng's advocacy of a global ethic is to approach it by way of an engagement with the worldview of political realism. The substantive argument of *A Global Ethic* is rooted in a rather detailed and generally sympathetic consideration of a realist orientation toward the behavior of states, taking account of such exemplary realists as Cardinal Richelieu, Chancellor Metternich, Otto von Bismarck, and most of all, Henry Kissinger. These were individuals who were widely admired (and despised) for their capacity to manipulate the foreign policies of their countries in a manner that denied human solidarity, and conceived of the state as the only internationally relevant form of human community. Küng concludes that realism of this statist variety has provided "the **political paradigm of modernity**" ([original boldface] as contrasted with the Christian universalism of the medieval period) but that it is increasingly in a shadowland, being "caught up in a fundamental crisis which reveals the moral doubtfulness of all real politics" (p. 17).

Küng relies on Kissinger's *Diplomacy* as the authoritative text of contemporary realism, which in turn is the dominant approach to world order.⁷ Küng treats Kissinger's career as a diplomat with the greatest respect; A "brilliant analyst of modern and contemporary politics," (p. 7), Kissinger provides, then, the exemplary case of the scholar/diplomat who, fairly conceived, illuminates the outlook of the realist, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the position from the perspective of global policymaking. Like Metternich in the nineteenth century, Kissinger seeks stability and security by way of balance of power geopolitics, and just as Metternich sought a new balance after the Napoleonic wars, Kissinger was seeking to find a comparable balance in the midst of the Cold War. Küng credits

Kissinger with various diplomatic achievements, perhaps most notably his role in opening of the U.S./China relationship as part of his overall effort to exert maximum pressure on the Soviet bloc and create a favorable balance for the West.

While appreciative of realist skills, K  ng is also sharply critical. He reads Kissinger as making "an eloquent and seductive **plea against an American 'idealism'**" and "**a plea for a power politics oriented on European statesmen of the past**" (p. 7; original boldface). As K  ng notes, Kissinger is intent on repudiating what he sees, along with others, as a deficiency in the American approach to global politics that reached its climax during the latter stages of the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. Kissinger reserves his plaudits for Theodore Roosevelt, described admiringly as epitomizing the "warrior statesman," while scornful of the efforts of Wilson to construct a new and more just world order after World War I as the essentially misguided undertaking of a "priest-prophet" (p. 9). Despite this historical dismissal, Wilson is taken seriously because Kissinger views variants of his idealism as continuing to remain dominant in America's approach to the world, and responsible for misassessments of national interests as realistically calculated.

With Kissinger, K  ng appears to view this tension in American political culture as genuine and significant. He sees in America a serious effort to find a way to participate in the world without abandoning morality, citing with approval, and a sense of its persisting relevance, Thomas Jefferson's contention that states should adhere to the same moral standards that are expected of individuals in their dealings with one another. K  ng also looks back critically at Kissinger's presentation of the high and low points in past statecraft, and basically inverts his assessments. In particular he finds the admiration for Richelieu badly misplaced, contending that not only Europe in general, but that even the French nation and its people suffered from Richelieu's ruthless pursuit of French expansionism. K  ng views these realist excesses as built into behavior that is neglectful of moral restraint. In this same spirit, he points to the eventual failure of the Nixon presidency that Kissinger served so prominently, as resulting from its moral bankruptcy (pp. 10-11). K  ng endorses the assessment of Kissinger's biographer, Walter Isaacson, that the victory of the West in the Cold War was not a vindication of realism as an approach to international relations. The West, according to Isaacson, won the Cold War mainly because "the values offered by its system . . . eventually proved more attractive" (p. 13).⁸ The burden of K  ng's argument is that the apparent realism of the realists is an illusion, that history moves in response to value preferences of people, and that it is essential for a government to discover prudent means to combine its ethical convictions with its material interests.

But Küng has additional adversaries to worry about. He seeks, in all respects, to avoid extreme positions, whatever their metaphysical claims. He opposes utopian movements that overlook the actualities of power and the need to oppose the forces of evil. Küng acknowledges the importance of bringing to bear countervailing power in the context of addressing the menace of Hitler and Naziism, and he views Western resolve in the face of Soviet expansionist threats in a favorable light. Similarly, and possibly with a more special insight, Küng seeks to distinguish his advocacy sharply from that of religious fanaticism in any shape. The ethical absolutism of extremist religion tends to be exclusivist, and inconsistent with the inclusiveness and spirit of mutual respect associated with a global ethic. For Küng an indulgent secularism is equally unacceptable, reducing the meaning of life to a crude materialism that often takes the form of obsessive consumerism, a planetary cultural force under the dominion of the economic globalists.

As an ethical stance, Küng opts for Aristotle's "golden mean" situated between a power-driven and "amoral realism" of Kissinger and one or another form of "ideological fanaticism," whether from right, left, or from extremist manifestation of organized religion (p. 19). In considering the rise of the sovereign state and its increasingly nationalist credo, as a historical process in Europe, Küng questions the inevitability of Machiavellianism.⁹ He selects Erasmus of Rotterdam as an example of someone who found a path between "the medieval fanaticism of the Counter-Reformation" and "the cynicism of modern real politics" (p. 20). On this middle path, the Aristotelean mean, Küng calls particular attention to the evolution of international law, referring to the Spanish School jurists Suárez and Vitoria, but with a special regard for the work of Hugo Grotius, often called the founder of modern international law.¹⁰ Tellingly, Küng observes that "none of these names appear in Kissinger's work," despite its length of over one thousand pages.¹¹

For Küng, World War I was an "epoch-making global upheaval" that led to the dismantling of a Eurocentric world and the beginning of postmodernity, including giving rise to "**a new paradigm of politics**" (p. 29; original boldface), later associated with the emergence of a more "polycentric" world that is also "post-colonial . . . and post-imperial" (p. 65). Küng associates Woodrow Wilson with an ethically meaningful response to this set of circumstances based on the insistence that in the future global security could not depend on balance of power adjustments, but would require collective security managed by the organized international community, an idea initially institutionalized in the form of the League of Nations and carried forward into the present by the United Nations. Wilson also supported the idea of "a peace with justice" for affected peoples, based on

the application of the principle of self-determination, although he was thinking of the remnant peoples that had comprised the fallen Hapsburg and Ottoman empires, and had no intention of encouraging the peoples living under European colonial rule to rise up in revolt or even of urging their gradual emancipation.

Küng views Wilson ambivalently, as a counterpoint to Kissinger. Wilson is called a "hopeful-hopeless idealist" (p. 29) who seemed unable to bring his vision of the future into the domain of effective politics, given the prevalence of a fairly cynical brand of realism among European leaders of the time. But in the end Küng seems disposed to believe in Wilson's approach, writing, "[t]he peace with justice of the 'idealists' would have been more realistic than the **dictated peace** of the realists; it would have spared the world a second, even more devastating, world war" (p. 33). Such a retrospective account is not altogether convincing. After all, the drift toward Hitlerism and a renewal of major warfare was a consequence of many factors and cannot be reduced to the impact of any one of these. Even so, there is no doubt that the harshness of the Versailles Peace Treaty was a major factor, although it is not at all evident that the more diligent implementation of Wilson's conception of the peace would have worked out any better or differently. Wilson's view of the role to be played by the League in the prevention of war did not correspond at all with the endorsement of sovereign rights of states or with the realist outlook of political leaders who continued to control policymaking and military capabilities. Arguably, Wilson did little more than offer a visionary template that could never have been actualized successfully in the world as it is politically organized. The same dilemma has persisted in the era of the United Nations. The famous promise of the Charter "to eliminate the scourge of war" is a matter of inspirational language, but the body of the Charter itself and, even more, the capabilities and experience of the organization have reaffirmed the primacy of Westphalian statecraft.*

Küng's overall view of developments after 1918 seems complex and inconclusive. For while he appears to endorse Wilson's approach, he takes critical note of the American withdrawal from Europe, as well as repudiating the futility of legalizing and moralizing gestures of the sort embodied

*"Westphalian statecraft" refers to the framework of state-centered world order that arose from the Treaty of Westphalia ending the Thirty Year War in 1648. It is often treated as marking the end of feudal Europe and the beginning of modern Europe, although to provide such a definitive marker is arbitrary. The process of change was gradual, with the rise to preeminence of the territorial state occurring over a period of several centuries, variously identified as early as the thirteenth. Similarly, elements of feudalism persisted long after 1648. But without question by the nineteenth century it was widely accepted that world order and international law were based, more or less exclusively, on interaction among sovereign states.

in the Briand-Kellogg Pact of 1928 that purported to outlaw aggressive war. Küng is not impressed by gestures, and believes that to alter warmaking it is necessary to back up a renunciation of war with "effective sanctions" that could be brought to bear upon a potential aggressor (p. 36).

Despite the rejection of Wilson's crusade for "a new world order," his undertaking does represent for Küng an irreversible rupture, which accounts for the claim that a postmodern paradigm was being engendered. For Küng, "[t]he art of politics in the postmodern paradigm consists in combining political calculation (or modern real politics) convincingly with ethical judgment (ideal politics)" (p. 66). Küng argues that **"there will be no new world order without a new world ethic"** (p. 92; original boldface). He goes on to clarify the nature of this requirement, insisting that "the global ethic is a **basic consensus** on binding values, irrevocable criteria and basic attitudes which are affirmed **by all religions** despite dogmatic difference, and which can indeed also be contributed [sic] by **non-believers**" (p. 92-3; original boldface).

On this basis, Küng seeks to identify a **"minimum ethical consensus"** that is deemed a possible and necessary project due to the emergence of certain global developments. He stresses "a community of destiny on our spaceship earth" and a TV-generated shared awareness of various struggles for "truth" and "justice" that build transnational bonds of solidarity (p. 95). Küng relies on Michael Walzer's notions of "moral minimalism" and "a 'thin' morality" to help orient this search for ethical norms that are devoid of specific cultural and religious content (p. 95).¹²

Where does this lead? On the basis of study and reflection, Küng suggests that the global ethic consists of two fundamental precepts that are embedded in each of the world religions:

- Every human being must be treated humanely!
- What you wish done to yourself, do to others [also formulated negatively, what you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others]. (p. 110)

These two normative ideas are then to be elaborated and sustained through reliance upon a series of directives that are embodied in all world religions: the commitment to a **"culture of nonviolence and respect for all life," "a culture of solidarity and a just economic order," "a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness," "a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women"** (p. 111; original boldface).

The bearing of religion on the global ethic is subtle, yet vital. After all, at a superficial level the global ethic can be, and has been, affirmed in various arenas without any reference to religion. Consider, for instance, the plea for global values in the various writings of the World Order Models

Project, in the final report of the Commission on Global Governance, the Declaration on Human Responsibilities of the InterAction Council, and the articulations of Parliamentarians for Global Action.¹³ Küng himself suggests that the confirmation of the emergence of a global ethic can be best discerned by an alleged trend toward giving human rights a priority over the pursuit of economic self-interest (p. 132).¹⁴

Küng is, of course, acutely conscious of the Enlightenment tendencies to marginalize the relevance of religion in public space. He rejects such marginalization: "Those who banish religion create a vacuum; at any rate they have to say what they have to offer in its place in this time of growing disorientation and pseudo-religiosity, particularly for many young people who are in search of meaning and orientation in values" (p. 133). Instead it becomes important to appreciate "[t]he integrating function of religion which cannot in the end be replaced by any philosophy or even any ethic" (p. 133). Küng believes that only religion has sufficient influence on a mass level to produce the sort of fundamental readjustment of focus on a behavioral level that is being proposed more abstractly as an implicit global ethic. In this sense, Küng conceives of the articulation of a global ethic to be an essentially intellectual task for the elite, whereas its implementation is political and depends on widespread public acceptance.

Küng lends concreteness to the claim of ethical relevance by discussing various concrete realities, including his view of the three main paths that an integrating Europe might follow: what he calls "**Technocratic Europe**," the functionalist Europe of the Brussels bureaucracy, essentially a mechanical bargain for the sake of higher economic growth and bigger profits; it overlooks what is for Küng the central reality that "Europe needs a **spiritual and ethical renewal**!" (p. 138) The second somewhat surprising path that Küng identifies is labeled "**The restoration of a Christian Europe**" and is depicted as a neomedieval project of the Catholic Church and its current pope, John Paul II, to re-Catholicize Europe along hierarchical, essentially antimodern and antidemocratic lines that are exclusivist in character. Küng regards such a project as deeply unacceptable on ethical grounds, as well as incompatible with the values and preferences of the overwhelming majority of Europeans, including those who regard themselves as Catholic. What is surprising, and revealing in its way, is why Küng finds this conception of a Christian Europe of sufficient relevance to be considered as a plausible scenario for the future. It may not be remiss to suspect the influence of autobiographical factors!

As might be anticipated, the preferred third path for Europe is identified as "**Europe with an ethical foundation**." This Europe would essentially give regional effect to the global ethic, taking positive account of the pluralistic, democratic developments, but also seeking to give a moral and spiritual dimension to the emergent European reality that overcomes the shadow

sides of modernity. Küng (again not surprising) is dubious about the effects of extreme secularism, individualism, and pluralism that push modernity toward an atomizing, consumerist, and materialist future. In this setting, "patchwork religion" does not provide a sufficient sense of ethical and spiritual cohesion. In Küng's words, "secularization and rationality cannot so easily replace tradition, religion and mystery" (p. 140). It is here, at this point, that Küng's distinctive vision comes to the fore. In contrast to the exclusivism attributed to the official Catholic approach, Küng favors an ethical Europe built on inclusivity, premised on a sense of responsibility toward others, an ethic that is at once "**liberating**" and "**binding**," and made the centerpiece of the efforts of churches and of organized religion generally (p. 141). This regional orientation should be outwardly inclusivist as well: relations with non-Europeans falling within the same framework.

The indispensable role of religion is to give depth and cohesive power to an ethical perspective, which is not possible for a humanistic ethos of similar content. Here Küng offers his own witness as a nondogmatic, nonsectarian, yet devout Christian. For Küng this participation in a distinct religious tradition gives a rootedness to solidarity with others, as well as provides the sense of awe and sacredness that fully empowers individuals and groups to act in the lifeworld. Küng's position here is subtle, and complex, as he strongly believes in the complementary relationship between religion and ethics, but he wants to keep open space for nonbelievers as participants in an ethical Europe.

Küng also extends these ideas to the phenomenon of globalization, seeking again to find common middle ground that accepts the basic momentum of late modernity, but seeks to modify it through the influence of a global ethic. The difference between the regional and the global is a matter of scope and degree, especially with respect to inter-civilizational relations. Küng sees the future beset by the same twin dangers of reductive secularism and fundamentalist religion. Küng's third way involves affirming religious identities of a traditional character, but as infused by a global ethic. Küng makes clear that he is not an advocate of some homogenized universal religion, but rather of a religious revival built around the shared universalist elements of each major world religion. On a global level, Küng sees the need to address business leaders as well as politicians, and is concerned about environmental decay and human rights as two vectors of accountability that market forces have not taken seriously enough in their relentless pursuit of profits and growth. Without a global ethic, Küng sees little hope for a sustainable and equitable global future, but he finds encouragement in the moves of world capitalism at Davos and elsewhere to depart from "market fundamentalism" and advocate "responsible globality" (pp. 220-76). There are many nuances that give a rich texture to Küng's advocacy,

but the essential message of bringing a global ethic to bear seems admirably simple in conception and application.

SECULARIST ALTERNATIVES TO AN INCLUSIVE GLOBAL ETHIC

To understand the particularity of K  ng's perspective, and that of kindred efforts that he has inspired and deeply influenced such as the Parliament of the World's Religions and the Universal Declaration of Responsibilities of the InterAction Council, it seems helpful to consider briefly some alternative initiatives that proceed from similar normative motivations. Such a broadened inquiry both highlights differences and similarities, but also shows that the modern world of states is giving way to an as yet undefined "postmodern" world that is premised on a shared human destiny that calls for a global mode of assessment and prescription. The point is that modernity circumscribed the political imagination by reference to the territorial sovereignty of the state, whereas postmodernity, while generally acknowledging the persisting importance of the state, is less clearly bounded and definitely more pluralistic, ranging from civilization to region to world and species.

Hans Jonas. A seminal figure in this resituating of normative horizons is Hans Jonas, a thinker whom K  ng acknowledges as leading the way. Jonas argues the case for a new sense of human responsibility as responding primarily to the threats posed by dangerous technological innovations that manifest "the vulnerability of nature." Unlike K  ng, Jonas rests his hope for response on a postreligious foundation as "the gods . . . are long gone."¹⁵ Jonas is much more a child of the Enlightenment than K  ng, conceiving of religion as essentially superseded by the rise of secular reason, but believing that a benevolent future depends on grounding action in public spaces on an ethical view of human nature that includes what he calls "lengthened foresight, that is, scientific futurology."¹⁶ Jonas rejects the earlier optimism of the Enlightenment, with its perspective based on hope and the idea of progress and, instead, to avoid future disaster, calls for "an imaginative heuristic of fear."¹⁷

Comparing these two figures, what is most notable, aside from their views of the relevance of religion, is their differing ethical priority. Jonas emphasizes the need to expand the domain of reason to take account of dangerous future prospects before it is too late, thereby fixing the location of responsible collective human action. In contrast, K  ng sees the problem of responsibility in more spatial terms, by reference to the tensions between civilizations and belief systems, and the assaults on human identity mounted

by consumerism on one side and by fundamentalism on the other. Jonas worries that human survival is in jeopardy without bringing longer term considerations to bear, whereas Küng, although mindful of survival dimensions of the present reality, is primarily preoccupied with the ideological dangers posed by the drift toward an irresponsible globalism.

World Order Models Project (WOMP). Ever since the late 1960s WOMP has been engaged in a collaborative project among scholars from different parts of the world to promote a just and equitable world order based on the acceptance of cultural and ideological differences, yet upon a shared commitment to a series of articulated world order values that are posited as universal. These values, while variable in specification, were abstractly formulated around four normative ideas: the minimization of political violence, the maximization of economic well-being, the promotion of social well-being and human rights, and the promotion of environmental sustainability. Such values were partly conceived as responses to serious shortcomings of the existing world order system: the war system, massive poverty and inequality, oppressive forms of governance, and environmental decay. WOMP encouraged the formulation of different recommendations as to the future, and was concerned with facilitating the reform of world order in an era of anticipated globalization.¹⁸ By and large, the WOMP enterprise was ambivalent about the relevance of religion to the possibility of a better future, yet it shared with Küng the strong attachment to an agreed global framework of values.

Küng's approach, grounded in religious consciousness, stressed very fundamental ethical principles relating to right action, whereas WOMP's secular grounding led it to emphasize ethical ideas that were historically relevant as responses to salient problems of global scope. The two perspectives can be seen to be complementary, and there is an encouraging convergence. Küng is recently grounding his global ethic on an analysis of substantive challenges ranging from the future of Europe, through an approach to ethnic conflict in the Balkans, to the regulation of the world economy. At the same time, WOMP appreciates increasingly the relevance of culture, which is shaped by religious traditions, and of the religious resurgence, to mobilizing social forces committed to achieving "humane governance" at all levels of political authority, from the local community to the world.

Commission on Global Governance. This commission, composed of prominent individuals, mainly distinguished as public servants who occupied in the past or present important government posts, issued a report in 1995 under the title *Our Global Neighbourhood*. As this title suggests, the normative premise reflected integrative trends in the world that were giving increasing relevance to the metaphor of "neighborhood" both as description and proposal. Even more than WOMP, the commission avoided any

direct reliance on religious outlooks or terminology, but shared with K  ng the conviction that a global ethic was possible and necessary, and its members and staff were probably familiar with K  ng's advocacy and quite possibly with the Declaration of the World Parliament of Religions. There is a definite similarity of outlook. The commission assumes the universality of the golden rule, urged the relevance of "religious teachings around the world," and invoked the UN Charter's emphasis on "inherent and inalienable rights of members of the human family."¹⁹ Because of the absence of a metaphysical foundation, the commission's advocacy is based on pragmatic and consequential reasoning rather than on intrinsic considerations. For instance, it encourages a shared global ethic by reasoning that "[o]ver the long run, rights can only be preserved if they are exercised responsibly and with due respect for the reciprocal rights of others."²⁰

The commission's emphasis was placed on widely shared "core values" (as supplemented by an emergent "global civic ethic of specific rights and responsibilities shared by all actors" and by an expanding body of international legal norms that were gradually altering claims based on sovereign rights and the principle of self-determination), including respect for life, liberty, justice and equity, mutual respect (tolerance), caring, and integrity (a counter to corruption).²¹ The report is very sensitive to the importance of respecting differences that derive from various cultural backgrounds, while at the same time encouraging dedication to the unified interests of humanity that transcend the fragmenting visions of nationalism, statism, and excessive marketization. It conceives of the imperatives of policy to be linked to the promotion of human rights, democracy, the United Nations, international law, humanitarian intervention, and the role of global civil society.

Although relating more closely to an immediate agenda of global reform than K  ng, the Commission on Global Governance is equally clear about the singular importance of global values, and even clearer about their radical character: "People have to see with new eyes and understand with new minds before they can truly turn to new ways of living. That is why global values must be the cornerstone of global governance."²² As with WOMP, the commission appears to derive its values from a blend of widely endorsed ethical sentiments and from ideas about how best to respond to a series of generally agreed world order deficiencies. It also endorses, without even K  ng's qualifications, the immediate agenda of the West: the spread of democracy and the virtues of market-driven globalization. No attention is paid to justifying the metaphysical underpinnings of such values. There is a presumed secular rationalist consensus in support of such values, which is deemed to be sufficient and, in any event, the most that the postreligious mind is prepared to affirm.

Küng indirectly challenges such secular complacency while welcoming the turn toward a global ethic that reinforces his own advocacy. For Küng, the historical prospect of a global ethic is crucially dependent on enlisting the world religions directly in the mobilizing effort. Without such religiously oriented activism, Küng does not foresee a significant political impact deriving from the global ethic, nor from the activism of transnational civil society. However, if churches, mosques, and temples around the world join in the effort, then the additional and complementary participation of various likeminded secular initiatives will hasten the process of implementation. The commission's emphasis is almost the reverse. It seems to rely on the rationalist appeal of mutuality in a globalized world and on the democratizing activism of transnational social forces as embodied in a more globally structured United Nations and a more encompassing global rule of law, especially in relation to human rights. The commission's essentially secular humanist vision never comes to terms with the tension between "a global neighborhood" and a world of increasingly unequal sovereign states, nor with the apparent contradiction between an endorsement of economic globalization and support for diminished economic disparities.²³

DOES HANS KÜNG HAVE A VISION FOR OUR ERA? PROSPECTS AND DILEMMAS

Given the complexity of the world and the elusiveness of change, it is difficult to evaluate the relevance of a given normative idea. Küng's general line of thinking seems to correspond with the ethical requirements of humane governance for the peoples of the world. At the very least, it provides a coherent framing of the issues relating to perspective and dialogue. As well, Küng's emphasis on cherishing traditional religious identities while discerning the core similarities with other religious traditions does provide a foundation for solidarity, and works against those in the West and the East that foresee the future as doomed to an era of intercivilizational conflict.

It is also helpful that Küng's outreach via the Parliament of World Religions, Global Ethic Foundation, and the InterAction Council are actively nurturing a climate of dialogue and issuing an urgent call to religious communities to participate in the lifeworld at this crucial historical time. Such a call, presupposing the relevance of normative and spiritual categories of meaning, challenges the economistic atmosphere produced by the ascendancy of neoliberal ideas about governance and the related social disempowerment of governmental institutions as a means to unburden the market by minimizing inefficiencies, and thereby ensure maximal economic efficiency. Küng's major effort is to reawaken a constructive religious activism,

while repudiating religious fundamentalism and exclusivist claims. This represents an important antidote to runaway secularism that is tied to the dynamic of uncontested capitalism, as globally disseminated by a private sector media dependent on consumerism for its own profitability.

Such a normative refocusing of energy is especially important in the wake of the collapse of socialism as a global political force and the overall weakening of organized labor. Capitalist circles were exhilarated by the outcome of the Cold War. Without the challenges of socialism and labor the capitalist ethos tends to adopt a cruel and socially complacent orientation. This orientation is not intrinsic to capitalism, but is rather an opportunistic response to a perceived historical situation. Such a tendency was reinforced by prevalent antiregulatory attitudes associated with a reaction against often heavy handed bureaucratic control of business and by the pressures generated by acute competitiveness arising from the transnational intercorporate struggle to gain global market share. These developments cumulatively have produced a process that might be described as "the social disempowerment of the state," which adds further to the problems of equity and empathy in a secular society organized along capitalist lines. In such a setting, only religious consciousness is widespread enough to offer a sense of an alternative perspective that seems capable of putting ideas of solidarity and compassion back on the political agenda. And only religion is universal enough to be resonant throughout the world.

At the same time, as Kung convincingly shows, that portion of the religious resurgence that centers upon a backlash to modernity mainly operates as a negative or regressive force. This type of resurgence tends to assume fanatical forms that intensify the destructive potentialities of nationalism and oppressive state rule. Religious extremism is not a constructive antidote to the shortcomings of secularism, but just as cruelty is not intrinsic to capitalism, so extremism is not intrinsic to religion. In this respect, Kung's idea is to reconcile robust religious engagement with the positive legacies of the Enlightenment, including its emphasis on reason and reasonableness, tolerance and moderation. Such features also resemble Kung's advocacy of the golden mean as the preferred means of addressing global issues.

Kung is equally clear about the irrelevance of a diluted religiosity, a variety of pseudo-religions, based on embracing a syncretist amalgam of world religions and declaring the resulting hodgepodge to be the new universal religion for an era of globalization. To be a vibrant and robust historical force, religion needs to retain its rootedness in a series of particular traditions and beliefs that are delimited in distinctive rituals, parables, mythic tales, and prophetic messages by each of the great world religions. As with state structures, religious institutions often become ossified over

time, their operatives being more concerned with bureaucratic stature and prerogative than with spirituality and the well-being of their most disadvantaged members. Often the vitality of a religious outlook is better associated with subtraditions and countertraditions within each religion than it is with mainstream orthodoxy. Kung's religiosity is explicitly associated with a high degree of responsiveness to implementing his vision of a global ethic as the North Star of the world, guiding and orienting those with responsibility for global governance.

Although Küng's assessment seems persuasive, it does contain some problematic aspects. For one thing, Küng purports to seek the minimum shared core values among the religions, associating this core with a thin morality that is devoid of the distinguishing beliefs and doctrines that are to be found in each particular religious outlook. As discussed, this leads to an operational emphasis on the golden rule and on treating each person humanely. The difficulty here is that if such widely shared ethical precepts are treated abstractly they seem irrelevant, while if regarded as the basis for judging action they appear to be too vague to have behavioral and policy implications. The global ethic is too easy an endorsement. If, however, such precepts were to be translated into action principles relating to behavior, then their implications seem too radical, given the distribution of power and privilege in the world, as well as Kung's willingness to work with congenial representatives of the established secular and religious orders. It would appear intolerable to accept the extremes of wealth and poverty that currently exist between regions, classes, races, and genders and are being extended still further all the time.²⁴ It seems especially intolerable to neglect the needs of disadvantaged peoples who are living in destitution, without basic human needs relating to food and water, health, education, shelter. The existence of refugees and displaced persons, as well as political prisoners, would not be acceptable.

In this respect, Küng's programmatic content for a global ethic seems to fall between stools—either as an irrelevant piety or a utopian dream. As such, the question of agency arises: the social forces that might implement the global ethic in relation to the authority of the state and the market. In fairness, Küng addresses these concerns, mounting a strong attack on the prevailing realist orientation of the state, arguing the case for an enlightened rationalism that incorporates the global ethic. He makes a comparable argument against neoliberalism in the setting of globalization and in relation to the future of Europe. But the argument is essentially an appeal to the long-run self-interest of states and business elites. It does not encourage a collaboration among transnational social forces and more humanely oriented governments, a recent practice that has had some notable successes such as the widely ratified 1997 Ottawa treaty prohibiting antipersonnel

landmines and the Rome treaty of 1998 to establish an International Criminal Court. Some assessment of this collaborative possibility seems more promising than a mere appeal to governmental elites to abandon their realist world pictures.

Although impressively sensitive to the challenges posed by realism and neoliberalism to the prospects for the global ethic, K  ng does not succeed altogether in depicting the depths of the difficulty. It is not only a matter of questioning the realist premises of statecraft, it is also necessary to consider the consequences for the state of subordinating its policymaking functions to the discipline of global capital. When in 1999 a clear social democratic mandate was given by the German electorate, it was expected and hoped that the new finance minister, Oskar Lafontaine, would be the person with the capacity to adapt German government policy in a more socially oriented direction that was less subservient to business interests. In fact, this expectation generated intense postelectoral opposition to Lafontaine in business and financial circles, including threats of capital flight, that was so formidable that it led to his resignation in a matter of weeks after Germans had cast their vote, at once a slap in the face of democracy and a seemingly necessary step to reassure the business world. Immediately, the stock markets signaled their approval by registering large gains and the political waters calmed. The point here is that governments are not "free" to embody the global ethic even in moderate forms of exhibiting a greater commitment to equity for their own territorial community if it is perceived as interfering with market logic. It is not that globalization has weakened the state, as much as it has reoriented its central mission.

There is also not enough discussion devoted by K  ng to geopolitical factors that put the West in a hegemonic relation to the rest of the world, or that make the United States a practitioner of hegemonic geopolitics despite its supposed identity as a state seeking to enhance the human condition. With a weak and weakened United Nations, it is almost inevitable that leading states will seek to provide for global security, and with the collapse of bipolarity, the United States finds itself fulfilling such a role, but with extremely controversial results that cannot easily be seen as consistent with the implications of a global ethic. Also, the current American global leadership takes the form of promoting the most unconditional forms of neoliberal capitalism, allowing market factors to take precedence over social factors, often leading to humanitarian catastrophe as through the implementation of IMF structural adjustment programs. It is not to be expected that K  ng would address these varied matters in detail, but only to the extent necessary to situate the project of achieving a global ethic within the matrix of contending political forces.

One final matter that bears on religious relevance. K  ng is silent about

religious activism, what I have called "engaged spirituality,"²⁵ stepping forward in moments of crisis, as a matter of religious conviction, to oppose violence and injustice. Such exemplary action has certainly been taken in this historical period, becoming especially salient in the United States and Vietnam during the Vietnam war. The nonviolent resistance of two Catholic priests, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, was an important witness against the radical evil of the American role in Vietnam. The self-immolation of Buddhist monks in Vietnam during the early 1960s was an even more powerful "cultural scream" in opposition to the war policies. Moving more positively in relation to religious institutions, it would seem important for religious institutions to view the forgiveness of debts to Third World countries, an initiative promoted in the Christian West by Jubilee 2000. But there are other opportunities as well to awaken the conscience of secular society and to deliver the message that religion is committed to inclusive ideals of peace and justice: religious leaders placing themselves on the frontlines between potential adversaries in warfare would, or could be, an immensely powerful impetus to celebrate and support the advent of a global ethic of the very kind that Küng is urging, as well as to dramatize its tangible relevance to human well-being and humane governance.

ENDNOTES

1. On fragmentation/globalization, see Ian Clark, *Globalization and Fragmentation: International Relations in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For a broader view of these contradictory pulls in the evolving global setting, see James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990) and Joseph A. Camilleri and Jim Falk, *The End of Sovereignty? The Politics of a Shrinking and Fragmenting World* (Hants, England: Edward Elgar, 1992); a recent assessment of these developments is found in a paper by Ronnie Lipschutz, "Regulation for the Rest of Us: Global Civil Society and the Democratization of Global Politics," presented at Rutgers University Workshop of Center for Global Change and Governance and the World Order Models Project, June 4-5, 1999.
2. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) (hereafter referred to as *A Global Ethic*). Page references in parentheses are to this book. Boldface type is used in quotations only when it appears in Küng's book. For a recent formulation by Küng, see "Global Ethic in Foreign Politics: The middle way between real politics and ideal politics," Fordham University Lecture, 18 Feb. 1999 (hereafter cited as Fordham University Lecture). [This lecture by Dr. Küng is published for the first time in the present issue of this Journal—Ed.] Küng's earlier call for a global ethic is contained in *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Crossroad, 1991). Finally, note should be taken of the existence in Tübingen of a Global Ethic Foundation for inter-cultural and interreligious research, education, and encounter, founded in 1995 to implement an outlook that appears inspired by Hans Küng.
3. In a broader sense, although without any direct explication, the realization of a global ethic at the level of practice in international life would contribute significantly to the achievement of what I have called "humane governance." See Richard Falk, *On Humane*

Governance: toward a New Global Politics (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1995).

4. K  ng's outlook embodies the emergent reality of overlapping loyalties and multiple citizenship. In a prefatory note K  ng reflects on the outlook of the book, suggesting that "its approach should be attributed less to my origin in the country of William Tell than to my advanced age" (p. xvi). For exploration of changing identity patterns and the idea of citizenship, see Falk, "The Making of Global Citizenship," in Bart van Steenberg, ed., *The Condition of Citizenship* (London, England: SAGE Publications, 1994), 127-40.
5. The conceptual background is closely linked to the idea of sovereignty as the basis of community, generating boundaries between "we" and "they," as well as between "inside" and "outside" that have been crucial in the development of international relations theory. This theme is best explored in R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/outside: international relations as political theory* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For a more cosmopolitan outlook that draws on Stoic philosophy, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. 50-84. Also see Nussbaum's lead essay in *For Love of Country* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1996), 2-17. The sense of the locus of loyalty and identity is highly contested. See essays in same book by Kwame Anthony Appiah, Amy Gutman, and Michael Walzer, at 21-29, 66-71, and 125-27, and Nussbaum's response, 131-44.
6. For an illuminating assessment of such a prospect, see Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge, England: Polity, 1999); see also Beverly Crawford and Ronnie Lipschutz, eds., *The Myth of Ethnic Conflict: Politics, Economics, and "Cultural Violence"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
7. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).
8. In my view both lines of thought—power relations are the main determinant of historical change and competing moral ideas provide the decisive agency for global change—overlook what seems to have been the proximate and principle cause of the Soviet collapse: a rigid internal bureaucratic structure that was unable to keep pace technologically with the West, and could not participate successfully in the world economy. For interpretation along these lines, see Manuel Castels, *The Information Age—Economy Society and Culture—End of Millennium* (Malden, MA: Blackwells, Vol. III, 1998), 4-69.
9. See also the somewhat parallel questioning by Stephen Toulmin who sets up the modernist crossroads as Descartes representing the road taken and Montesquieu as the road not taken, arguing that role of reason might have been much less dogmatic had Montesquieu prevailed. See Stephen Toulmin, *The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990).
10. On the importance of Grotius in relation to the normative (moral and legal) transition from medievalism to modernity, see Richard Falk, *Law in an Emerging Global Village: A Post-Westphalian Perspective* (Ardsley, NY: Transnational Publishers, 1998). See also Hedley Bull, Benedict Kingsbury, and Adam Roberts, eds., *Hugo Grotius and International Relations* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1990); Yasuaki Onuma, ed., *A Normative Approach to War: Peace, War, and Justice in Hugo Grotius* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1993). Elsewhere, K  ng credits Max Weber and Hans Jonas for identifying and advocating this middle path (p.65).

K  ng's recent focus (see Fordham University Lecture) on the middle way emphasizes a policy domain intermediate between Machiavellian/Kissingerian realism and Wilsonian utopianism, what is often associated in American political thought with "liberal internationalism." For an influential formulation, see Stanley Hoffmann, *Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981).

11. It should be observed that such an invocation is not free from controversy and presents its own difficulties. Kant, among others, in *Perpetual Peace* refers to this same set of international law scholars as "miserable consolers" because of their willingness to lend a legal cover story to support a government's justification for recourse to war.
12. K  ng also invokes Max Huber's ideas of a *Weltethos*, "basic common factors" among

- religions. See Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1994).
13. For representative perspectives that share a normative kinship with Küng's advocacy of a global ethic, see *Our Global Neighbourhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Kennedy Graham, ed., *The Planetary Interest* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999); Saul H. Mendlovitz, ed., *On the Creation of a Just World Order* (New York: Free Press, 1975).
 14. I use the word "alleged" because I disagree strongly with Küng's assessment here. Although the emergence of human rights in recent decades is an encouraging development, it has not in any serious sense displaced the primacy of geopolitical or economic factors in the execution of foreign policy by major states. Such a displacement would be entirely at odds with the prevailing neoliberal and realist climate of ideas.
 15. Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 6.
 16. *Id.*, at x.
 17. *Id.*, at x.
 18. For WOMP formulations, see Saul H. Mendlovitz, n. 13; for more recent efforts, see R.B.J. Walker, *One World, Many Worlds: Struggles for a Just World Peace* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1988) and Richard Falk, n. 3.
 19. See n. 13, at p. 48.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. *Id.*, at pp. 48-9.
 22. *Id.*, at p. 47.
 23. For an analysis along these lines, essentially criticizing the commission's orientation as insufficiently radical to provide a political foundation for its reformist proposals, see Richard Falk, "Liberalism at the Global Level: The Last of the Independent Commissions?" *Millennium*, vol. 24, no. 3 (1995), 563-76.
 24. For data and analysis relating to income and wealth gaps, see especially *Human Development Report 1997* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
 25. Richard Falk, "Politically Engaged Spirituality in an Emerging Global Civil Society," *ReVision*, vol. 15, no. 3, (Winter 1993), 137-44.